

The Possibilities of the Clifton Conference

Address of Dr. John E. White, of Atlanta, Ga., in Accepting the Presidency of the Clifton Conference, August 18, 1908

IT will be permitted to me, in assuming the responsibility of presiding over this Conference, to strike the first note and the last note, the words of greeting and of farewell.

We are grateful to God for the providential connection of Mr. and Mrs. W. N. Hartshorn with the great cause with which we are every one either personally or officially connected.



REV. JOHN E. WHITE, D.D.
Pastor Second Baptist Church,
Atlanta, Ga.
President Clifton Conference,
August 18, 19, 20, 1908.

There have been many gatherings for the purpose of discussing the question which we are going to discuss, and great good has come from many of them; but I am of the opinion, gentlemen, and so wrote to a prominent gentleman in Atlanta, Ga., that this Conference, we are opening to-day, represents more intelligence and more experience with the question of the Negro and his welfare and progress than was ever before assembled together in this country. The possibilities of this Conference are as large as the promises of God to earnest and sincere men when they come together to plan for his Kingdom, and are as large as the capacity and as large as the needs of eight million people in our land.

The Value of Personal Contact

We are already beginning to realize one great value which will deepen and broaden as this Conference proceeds, "the value of personal contact." If you will permit me, I will illustrate what I mean by a story. I knew in North Carolina

a typical mountaineer, very positive in his ideas and particularly suspicious of womenfolk when traveling by them-

selves. There happened to be in Massachusetts a good Presbyterian woman who had read in her church paper of the great ignorance existing among what was called the "mountain whites" of the South, and she consecrated herself to go along down into that country for the purpose of helping them and lifting them up and teaching school among them. She landed at the little town of Marshall, and was there much upset that she was in the town and not among the country people. She was told to go on and she would find them.

The mail carrier of that country was called to go some sixty miles, and he was to take her out into the mountains. So they started out, and after a little while she thought she would commence a conversation. She thought she should tell who she was, and so she thought the best thing to do was to tell him where she came from and of the things up there. She told him of the elevated railroad and of the great educational and social progress, but she made no impression on the old gentleman. He paid no attention, but clucked to his horse. She got discouraged at last and fell into silence. At length he turned around and rather suspiciously said, "I reckon you-uns up there are doing lots of things that we don't know nothin' about." He did not proceed to moralize, but at the end of a half hour he said, "I reckon we-uns down here are doing lots of things that you don't know nothin' about." Another stretch of silence and then he said, "Wall, I reckon that mixin' might larn somebody." I think we feel that this contact in itself is a blessing, that "mixin'" is going to "larn" us all.

Another blessing is the coöperation of spirit which will result in the coöperation of head and heart. A great deal of force is wasted by the lack of coöperation among the forces. My father, who was a soldier, has said often that when a regiment reached a pontoon bridge the order was given, "Break ranks!" And they went over each man for himself. If they had gone in solid ranks they would have exerted such a force as to destroy the bridge. A great deal of our force goes to waste because of lack of concerted movement.

The Wolves and Mules in Texas

A story is told of the wolves and mules in Texas. When attacked, the mules turned their heads out to the wolf and put their heels to each other, and the result was the mules had a mix-up. After a while the wolves came again and the mules put their heads together and their heels to the wolves, and there was